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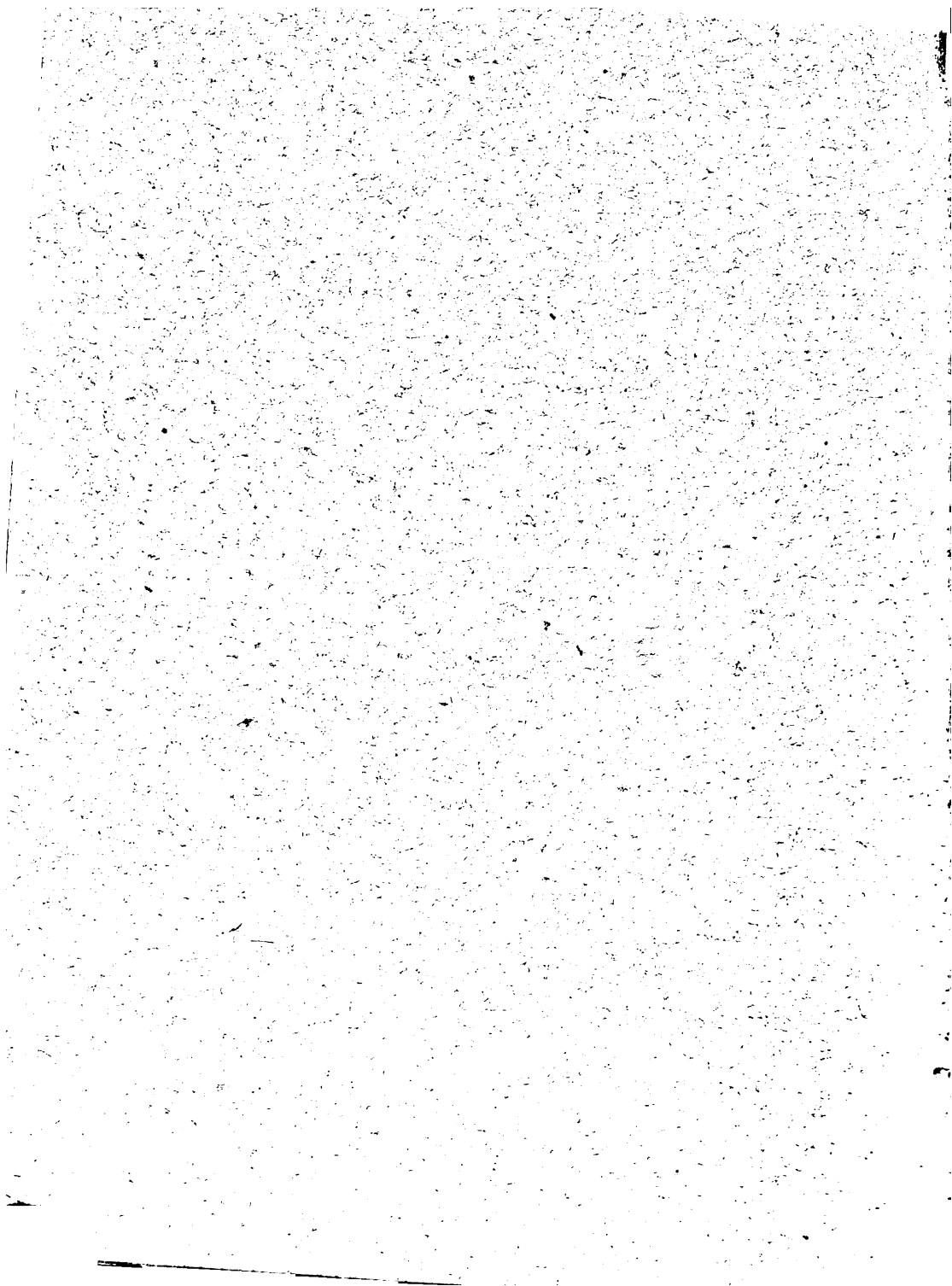
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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

IN PHILADELPHIA, PA.

BY

GEORGE DANA BOARDMAN

AT THE CLOSE OF HIS THIRTY YEARS' MINISTRY AMONG THEM

SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 13, 1894

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST

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"THAT THEY MAY BE PERFECTED INTO ONE."

—*John xvii, 23.*

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Dearly beloved fellow-members of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia:

IN closing to-night my thirty years' ministry among you, it may have been expected that I would preach what is generally called a Farewell Sermon. But I cannot bring myself to believe that indulgence in personal reminiscences or allusions, however natural or delightful, makes a fitting close of a pastorate even so long and happy as mine. Let me then rise above all personalities and speak to you of some larger and more abiding theme bearing on the Kingdom of God.

This morning our theme was "A Baptist Church." Allow me to recapitulate; especially in view of our evening theme, which, in a certain sense, may be said to be complementary to the morning. I endeavored to make the following points:

A Baptist
Church.

First—Definition of a Baptist Church:—A Baptist Church is a voluntary band of baptized Christians organized for Christ's service.

Secondly—Purpose of a Baptist Church:—To serve our Lord Jesus Christ: (1) By obeying his commands (the precepts of his ordinances, acts, examples, character, etc.). (2) By unfolding his truth (preaching, Bible schools, training schools, etc.). (3) By extending his sway (home and foreign, etc.).

Thirdly—Composition of a Baptist Church:—(1) A voluntary membership (not hereditary). (2) A converted membership (not sponsorial). (3) A baptized membership (the baptism being based on personal regeneration,

personal convictions, etc.). (4) A trained membership (in systematic theology, practical ethics, etc.). (5) A consistent membership (consistent with creed, profession, especially with the symbolism of baptism).

Fourthly—Creed of a Baptist Church:—In general harmony with the Catholic Faith of Christendom from the beginning; its difference from creeds of other Christian churches being theological or metaphysical, not ethical or practical; the tendency toward greater simplicity of doctrinal statements being a healthful sign of our times; etc.

Fifthly—Ordinances of a Baptist Church:—(1) *Baptism:* (a) Meaning of the word (burial, and very especially resurrection; Christ by his own resurrection transfigured immersion into also emersion; sadness of the news when a ministerial correspondent of a religious journal can say nothing better of his success than this, "It was my privilege last Lord's Day to bury ——— converts in baptism." Resurrection—not burial—the chief thing in the Christian life); (b) Subjects of baptism (none but Christians; not but that we ought to dedicate our infants to God in his church. I wish we would revert to the example of our Baptist fathers; the very first entry on the fly-leaf of the marriage book of our venerable church is this: "John, son of Jeremiah Sullivan, was this day, April 7, 1769, named and devoted." If more were consecrated in infancy, more would be baptized in youth). (2) *Communion:* (a) Meaning of the ordinance (commemorative, representative, covenantive, communicative, associative, proclamative, anticipative, etc.); (b) Subjects of communion (none but baptized Christians; not that this, as you well know, is my view; I believe that communion, like baptism, is a Christian ordinance rather than an ecclesiastical. It is often said that when a pastor does not agree with the views of his denomination, he ought to leave it; I do not think so; it is his business to lead his flock, not to follow it. Of course, he must be frank and outspoken at the points wherein he differs from his denomination, distinctly stating that they are his views, not his denomination's. Personally, I believe in "open communion;" ecclesiastically, I practice "close communion;" etc.).

Sixthly—Officers of a Baptist Church:—Presbyters, bishops, pastors, teachers, evangelists, deacons, deaconesses, lay-workers, trustees, committees, singers, ushers, etc.; each member of the church, whether pastor or layman, man or woman, patriarch or child, is in God's sight his priest.

Seventhly—Discipline of a Baptist Church:—(1) Not penal, but educational; reformatory; to recover wanderers; save offenders; etc. (2) To separate the incorrigible; etc.

Eighthly—Relation of a Baptist Church:—(1) To the State (absolute separation. We owe to the State our allegiance, support, prayers, etc.; let us vote for none but upright men; I believe (at least till we can have some kind of duly restricted franchise) in woman suffrage, as I said in yonder Association Hall nearly twenty years ago; but we will ask from the State no pecuniary favors or special immunities. With our esteemed friend and fellow-worshiper, Dr. Wayland, I believe in the taxation of church property. Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and trust in chariots, because they are many, or in horsemen, because they are very strong, etc.). (2) To the denomination (local independence, wholesome within due limits; gross abuses of the doctrine of independence; letters of transfer, commendation, etc.).

Ninthly—Appliances of a Baptist Church.—Public worship (adoration; thanksgiving; confession; aspiration; offerings; intercession; exposition; application; etc.); daily character the best liturgy; devotional services; Bible schools; mission schools; missionary societies, home and foreign; charitable societies; young people's associations; sociables; visitations; parish schools; guilds; lectures; athletics; etc.; in brief, "edification," that is, Society-building; Christ's church not an iron groove, but a living tree; division of labor; community of purpose; etc.; the church's true hold on society lies not in creed, but in life; one small live church is worth more than a thousand large dead churches; etc.

Such is a rough outline of a Baptist Church:—(a) A band; (b) A voluntary band. (c) An independent band. (d) A Christian band. (e) A baptized band. (f) An organized band. (g) An executive band; etc.

And now my last official summons to you is to continued personal church activity. Most heartily do I thank those of you who, during these thirty years, have co-operated with me in public worship, evening as well as morning; our Friday evening devotional services; our Bible schools; our missionary societies; our charities; etc. Co-operate with my successor in every department of church life—liturgical, charitable, educational, missionary, reformatory, financial, etc. You will best honor me by being loyal to my successor; if any of you leave us because I am no longer pastor, you will prove by that with-

drawal that my ministry here has been in vain. Believe not only in our noble Baptist Denomination; believe especially in our own glorious First Baptist Church. Our dear old church is not going down because this or that person leaves it. Stand by our blessed old flag loyally, reverently, gratefully, bravely, trustfully. So shall we be worthy of our own glorious history of these nearly two hundred years. So shall we help toward realizing that larger, nobler, ideal Church of which I now proceed to speak. I think you will admit, dearly beloved, that this theme has been one of the characteristics of my long ministry among you.

As our morning topic was local, we took a local text—a clause in *Revelation 3: 7*; “*The Church in Philadelphia.*” As our evening topic is catholic, we take a catholic text—*Ephesians 1: 22, 23*; “*The head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*”

Our theme then is this—“THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.”

In speaking of this theme, I wish to confine myself in the main to two of the many meanings which this word “church” has; presenting it, first, as a divine organism, and, secondly, as a human organization; or, to use more familiar but less accurate phraseology, “the church invisible,” and “the church visible.”

I.—The Church
as a Divine
Organism.

And, first, the Church as a Divine Organism. Observe: I do not now, at this stage of my presentation, mean by this word “church” any local organization, or the aggregate of organized churches, or the general mass of professing Christians. But I do mean by this word “church” the one organic, universal, spiritual Church of the living God—that ideal Church

of his which he has bought with the blood of his own adorable Son. In other words, I mean by the Church the Kingdom of God as administered by his Son in the hearts of men.

Glance then for a moment at some of the differences between a church in the sense of a human organization and the Church in the sense of a Divine Organism. An organized church is a voluntary association, dependent on conditions of place and time and form; it may be, and often is, rent by dissensions; it may suffer extinction; it acts on itself legislatively, receiving or dismissing or disciplining or excluding its members according to its own will; the relation between its components is constructed and temporal; in brief, it is a human organization.

But the Church Organic is a Divine Society, independent of conditions of place and time and form. It was never "constituted" in human time and space; it was born of a past eternity, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, having immortality for its birthright and creation for its heirloom. Its members are not inserted into it by baptism or by letters of transfer from other churches; they are corporate, essential, living parts of it. Being that spiritual body of which Christ is the spiritual head, there is between them, as between him and them, community of sentiment—thought, experience, judgment, purpose, movement—in a single word, life. And this ideal Church, surveyed as a whole, in and by itself, has never had any outward, formal organization. True, it has its creed; but this creed is not written in any stone tables of theological symbols; this creed is written with the Spirit of the living God in tables that are hearts of flesh. It

has its condition of membership; but this condition is neither baptism nor vote of those already members; this condition is faith in the Divine Father, as revealed in the Divine Son, through demonstration of the Divine Spirit. It has its member roll; but this member roll no mortal eye has seen; this member roll is in the Lamb's scroll of life. It has its sessions; but these sessions are not held in any structures of wood or brick or stone; these sessions are held in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. It has its pastor; but this pastor no earthly presbytery has ordained; this pastor is the minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. It has its music; but this music is not the audible melody of solo or chorus; this music is the silent rhythm of human works and divine grace. It has its baptism; but this baptism is not in any earthly water; this baptism is in the Holy Spirit. It has its communion; but this communion is not in any earthly bread and wine; this communion is in the living bread and the living water that came down from heaven. It has its polity; but this polity is not the polity of written constitution and by-laws; this polity is the polity of holy living and godliness. It has its liturgy; but this liturgy is not the liturgy of rubric; this liturgy is the liturgy of daily character. Take all these things away—take away creed, member roll, sanctuary, minister, music, baptistery, communion table, liturgy, discipline. What have you taken away? You have taken away only what is formal and incidental and transient; the Church of the living God, in all the essentials of her nature, still survives.

W. F. L.

Not that I would for a moment hint that we do not need church organizations or the enforcement of our Master's ordinances. These we must have and must strenuously maintain; for they are, at least in this æon, essential not only to the spread of the gospel, but also to the preservation of the Christian life itself. Indeed, I am almost ready to affirm that without churches, that is, formal organizations, we could hardly have the Church, that is, the spiritual organism of which I am now speaking. In fact, all life tends to organization; even as all death tends to disorganization. Accordingly, a church in the sense of a formal organization is as truly a divine institution as the Church in the sense of a spiritual organism. He who is too good for a local, visible church is not good enough for the universal, invisible Church. In short, a church is Christ's appointed means to the Church. Nevertheless, the Church which is the subject of my address at this stage is larger and diviner than even the ecclesiastical organizations of the apostolic period. It is the Church of the heavenly Bridegroom; the corporation of regenerate characters; the body of Jesus Christ; the Kingdom of God.

I have dwelt thus long on this point because this distinction between the church as a human organization and the Church as a divine organism is of the utmost consequence, doctrinally and practically. This word "church" is so ambiguous that, unless we use it discriminatingly, the spirit of a remark or even the tenor of a whole discourse may be misinterpreted. Let us then cherish the habit of using this term "church" scrupulously, ever carefully distinguishing between a church organized and the Church organic; between

a church local and the Church universal; between a church divisible and the Church indivisible; between a church mortal and the Church immortal; between a church nominal and the Church ideal; between a church constructed or man's fabric and the Church born or Christ's body.

This Organic
Church a
Unity.

And this organic body of Christ—not the organized churches of Christendom—is an organic unity. St. Paul portrays this unity under a sevenfold aspect thus:

“There is one body (namely, the Christian Church); and one Spirit (namely, the Holy Ghost); even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling (namely, the one heavenly vocation; one Lord (namely, the one Lord Jesus Christ); one faith (namely, the one trust in this one Lord); one baptism (namely, the one baptism in the one Spirit by the one faith into the one body); one God and Father of all (namely, the one All-Father-God), who is over all, and through all, and in all.”—*Ephesians 4: 4-6*.

This churchly unity is also divinely foreshadowed in such figures as these: Many stones, one temple; many branches, one vine; many folds, one flock; many tribes, one Israel; many members, one body. Listen especially to a classic analogy of our Master's greatest apostle—an analogy so profound that it will outlive all theories of Christian society, because founded in living physiology; it being, so to speak, a natural parable of the Church of Jesus Christ:

Analogy
of the
Human Body.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; it is not therefore not of the body. And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; it is not therefore not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now

hath God set the members each one of them in the body even as it pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now they are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary; and those parts of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness; whereas our comely parts have no need; but God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, that there should be no schism (rending, dismemberment) in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and severally members thereof (members each in his part).”—*I Corinthians 12: 12-27*

Of course this paragraph does not teach that Christ and his Church form one corporal structure, having bodily organs. It is an analogy, not a proposition; accordingly, it is to be taken sense-wise, not sound-wise. And what the analogy teaches is this: The relation between Christ and his Church is as real, as vital, as reciprocal, as organic, as the relation between the head and its body. And now let us attend to some of the lessons which this profound analogy suggests.

And, first, as the body, including head and members, forms one organism, so the Church, including Christ and his people, forms, so to speak, one personality. The statement you perceive is two-fold. First, Christ himself is the head. Grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ. For Christ's Church is no headless torso. Being himself her head, Christ is, so to speak, the nervous center of his Church, sharing her sensations, whether of joy or of grief; co-ordinating her faculties, directing her movements, unifying her activi-

Christ and His
Church One
Personality.

Eph. 4: 15.

ties, maintaining her life. And as there is but one Christ, so there is but one head. The Lamb of God is no hydra-headed monster. And, secondly, as Christ is the one head, so Eph. 1: 22, 23. his Church is his one body. Gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all, the overflowing receptacle of his measureless amplitudes. Being his own body, his Church is, so to speak, a part of his own personality, drawing from him her life, sharing his experience and character, executing his will. As Augustine profoundly says: "*Totus Christus caput et corpus est*" (the whole Christ is head and body). Or, as another Latin proverb states it still more compactly: "*Ubi Christus, ibi Ecclesia*" (where Christ is, there the Church is). And as Christ is not a monstrosity in the sense of being many-headed, so his Church is not a monstrosity in the sense of being many-bodied. As there is but one Christ, even the head, so there is but one Church, even his body. Christ and his Church are one personality.

Christ and His
Church a Mani-
fold Diversity.

Secondly, as the body involves diversity of members and functions, so does the Church. As the body is not all brain, or heart, or eye, or foot, or blood, or nerve, or bone, or cell; so the Church is not all conscience, or reason, or sensibility, or will, or creed, or polity, or minister, or layman, or sex, or sect. The Church has all variety of gift, faculty, grace, temperament, experience, vocation, method, opportunity, conception. And as uniformity is a mark of the lowest stage of existence, so variety is a mark of the highest. The nobler the life, the more complex and differenced. For example: How wonderfully life complicates and diversifies as, starting with

the lowest forms of animal existence, we trace its ever-multiplying differentiations in the amœba, the polyp, the clam, the spider, the salmon, the lizard, the eagle, the lion, and, finally, man himself.

Indeed, one of the happiest definitions of life is this by Professor Guyot: "Life is the mutual exchanging of relations." And the higher the life, the intenser the exchanging. Contrast, for instance, the child of barbarism and the child of civilization. How simple the wants of the savage; how few and rude his tools; you might almost gather them into a single shop. But how diversified the wants of the civilized man; how numberless and complicated his tools; the vast grounds of our Columbian Exposition could not contain them. In brief, differentiation is the very condition of life. Dead things are uniform; live things are multiform. Every growing thing grows by multiplication of organs and functions and their consignment to specific ends. Development is by specialization. How wonderfully this comes out in the growth of the germinating vesicle of the egg or the cell! And the higher the grade of being, the more individualized, as well as the more complicated, become its organs and functions. Now the Church of Christ is the superbest finite instance of differentiation and specialization; and this alike in respect of organs, functions, gifts, opinions, methods. Christ's Church is a myriadfold diversity.

Thirdly, as the body is diversity in unity; so also is Christ's Church. For consider what unity means; specially as distinguished from units. A unit is a single one, surveyed externally, in isolation from other ones. A unity is also a single one; but it is

Christ and His
Church a
Diversified
Unity.

surveyed internally, in its parts ; each and every part being in mutual adjustment to one common end. A unit is a single, isolated one ; a unity is a systematized union of several diverse ones into a state of oneness. A unit is one in the sense of numerical singleness ; a unity is one in the sense of harmonious pluralness. For example : A molecule of water, considered in its wholeness and in distinction from other molecules of water, is a unit ; but the same molecule of water, considered in its parts as consisting of eight weights of oxygen and one weight of hydrogen, is a unity. But unity implies something more than harmonious variety of parts ; it also implies the subordination of these various parts to one common end. It is this co-operation of diverse parts to a common end which makes these diverse parts as a whole a unity. For example : The separate blocks in a stoneyard are not a unity, they are only units ; but actually bring them together and fit them to one another in due shape and order for the purpose—say of a temple structure, and they become a unity. In brief, it is the co-ordination of diverse units for a common end which makes a unity. And observe the effectiveness of a duly-grouped co-ordinated unity. How is it that a steam engine, although small compared with the mass it moves, is able to drive a mighty craft with her ponderous cargo in teeth of billow and tempest from continent to continent ? It is not merely because it is made of iron and worked by the power of steam ; it is also because valves and pistons, cranks and wheels, shaft and propeller, all work in reciprocal adjustment and harmonious co-operation to a common end, namely, sending the steamer across the Atlantic. But let some slight de-

rangement of the machinery occur, some valve refuse to work, some pin give way, and the engine, which has been a useful unity, becomes a mass of useless units. That is to say : Unity consists in converged diversities, where all the ends are means and all the means are ends. Or to illustrate from St. Paul's great analogy of the bodily organism : A finger, surveyed as a finger in distinction from other fingers, is a unit ; but the hand, surveyed as a system of fingers, is a unity. And this convergent diversity is indispensable to the unity. If the whole body were an eye where were the hearing ? If all the members were similar members—all eyes, or ears, or noses—where were the body ? But now they are diverse members, and therefore one body. And this diverse co-membership is mutually co-necessary—"the eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee." And this necessity of diversity is especially true of the smaller, obscurer members of the body ; those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary. If there were no cells, there could be no blood ; and if there were no blood, there could be no body, either corporal or personal. Thus the unity of the body consists in the unified diversity of its parts. And the Church of Christ is the noblest specimen of a bodily organism, because she is Christ's body ; he the head, she the members. Accordingly, the Church, in the adjustment of her own most multiform organs, in the co-ordination of her own most diversified functions, in the unification of her own most heterogeneous elements and conditions, is the consummate finite instance (Deity is the infinite instance) of unity as well as of diversity. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Psalm 133 : 1.

The Holy
Spirit the
Secret of the
Church's Unity

Observe now that it is the Holy Spirit who is the unifying force in the Church or body of Christ. He it is who diversifies the gifts, allots the functions, unifies the whole. Let me cite another classic paragraph from the same great Paul:—

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will.” *I Corinthians 12: 4-11.*

Thus it is that in one Spirit, even the Holy Ghost, all we were baptized into one body, even the spiritual body of Christ, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, whether Quakers or Baptists; and were all made to drink of one Spirit, even the Divine. The Holy Ghost is the secret of the Church's unity.

Thus the diversified unity of the bodily organism is the culminating symbol and type of the spiritual organism or Christ's mystical body. And Christ's mystical body or the spiritual organism is in a certain sense the Divine model for our ecclesiastical organizations, or the actual church of Christendom. And the great practical problem of ecclesiology is to make the church organized or man's fabric coincident with the Church organic or Christ's body; a problem which, like the famous problem of squaring the circle, though incapable of absolute solution, is nevertheless capable of approximations ever closer and closer.

And this leads us to our second main point, namely, The church as a human organization; or the church of man's structure. Alas, we must now move, at least for the present, in a lower plane.

II.—The Church as a Human Organization.

For observe, with grief and shame, the disunity of the organized church. She is indeed, literally speaking, a church militant on a war footing. Unfortunately, however, this war footing is an internecine strife. Instead of her wrestling against the dark principalities of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies, she is wrestling against her own flesh and blood; making schism in her own body, tearing asunder the limbs of her own personality. Survey her manifold and bitter divisions and subdivisions; her clashing sects, creeds, politics, rivalries; her Shibboleth din of "I am of Paul;" "I am of Apollos;" "I am of Cephas;" "I am of Christ." Paradoxical as it sounds, the church militant will never become the church triumphant till she becomes the church pacific. Instead of her being one united Israel of Jehovah of hosts, she is rather a captive and dismembered Israel; her dislocated bones lying scattered in the great valley of this world's Babylonia. And were James the Just or Peter the Rock to return, and indite another Epistle General to the Church of God, I fear that he would still have to address it somewhat as follows:—

The Organized Church a Disunity.

"To the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, even to the elect sojourners scattered in the Pontus of Baptismalism, the Galatia of Episcopalianism, the Cappadocia of Presbyterianism, the Asia of Methodism, the Bithynia of Lutheranism; Greeting."

Who of us does not feel that this is a most deplorable state of things? Consider for a moment some of the many evils of

Evils of Sectarianism.

sectarianism—I mean the spirit of sectarianism—not the mere fact that there are sects. Sectarianism, for instance, alienates the Christian brotherhood, setting the members of the one great family in Christ against each other; it narrows our spiritual horizon; inverts the gospel order by exalting ordinances above principles, ritual above character; caricatures truth by magnifying its fractions and minifying its integer; dissipates spiritual energies by scattering them instead of concentrating them; involves needless expense by rearing and maintaining several kinds of churches in a neighborhood where our God would be better served were there but one church; repels the onlooker, for he will not confess a divided, sectarian Christ; worse than all, arrests the moral growth. Listen to St. Paul as he expostulates with the sectaries of Corinth:

“Brothers. I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not able to bear it; nay, not even now are ye able; for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal? And walk after the manner of men (not Christians)? For when one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”—*I Corinthians 3; 1-4.*

That is to say: Catholicity is the output of maturity, the full costume of manhood; sectarianism is the stair-bar of infancy, the small clothes of babyhood. Such are some of the many evils of the denominational spirit. Taking everything into account, I am inclined to think that sectarianism is the church's mightiest obstacle in her march to the City of the Foundations. For every kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, but must come to desolation. If Messiah's forces are in schism, how then can his kingdom stand? But let us be

fair and not overlook the church's real unity. For at all essential points, Christ's Church—the church organic, whatever the land, or age, or sect—is at bottom sublimely one. And for that one Church of Christ every true member of it (whether Baptist, Quaker, or Romanist) will, if need should arise, be equally ready to die. But, although Christ's Church in its essentials is one, men's churches in their incidentals are many and diverse. What we quarrel about is not moralities, but ceremonies; not divine commandments, but human inferences; not God's truth, but men's interpretation of it—that is, men's creeds. Nevertheless, our blessed Lord has prayed that the members of his body may be perfected into one; and surely he did not pray in vain.

And so we pass to ponder the problem of Ecclesiastical Unity. How shall we make the church of man and the Church of Christ—the church organized and the Church Organic, the church of manner and the Church of Matter, the church of form and the Church of Life—coincident? In short, how shall we bring about the ideal, promised unity? It is a mighty problem, and as gracious as it is mighty; wholly worthy the best thought of Christendom.

Problem of
Ecclesiastical
Unity.

First of all, then, "Is the Unification of Christendom desirable?" "Unification," I say, not "Reunion." For I am not aware that Christendom has ever been united in such a way as to make its reunion desirable. The sad fact seems to be that the church of the primitive period, in so far as it was organized at all, instead of having been, as we so often fondly imagine, a concord of brothers, was largely a discord of wranglers; so that St. Paul felt himself constrained, for example, to rectify

Is the Unifi-
cation of
Christendom
Desirable.

the doctrinal heresies of Rome; to pacify the warring sectaries of Corinth; to reclaim the theological apostates of Galatia; to guard against a pagan life in Ephesus; to exhort Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord in Philippi; to warn against the dangerous tendencies in Colosse; to rebuke the disorderly walkers in Thessalonica; to caution Timothy and Titus against the heresiarchs who were already subverting the churches. If the "Christendom" of Christ's day were already a union, why did Christ pray that his followers might become one, perfected into unity? The truth is, the primitive church, like every other thing of life, began in infantile imperfection, yet subject to the blessed law of growth and perfection. Ideals, always excepting the one Perfect Man, are ever before us, never behind us. That is not first which is not spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. Our question then is not, "Is the Reunion of Christendom desirable?" But our question is, "Is the Unification of Christendom desirable?" And to this question I must answer both "No" and "Yes." Let me then discuss this problem of Ecclesiastical Unity both negatively and affirmatively.

Cor. 15: 46.

Unity Cannot
be Secured
by Decreeing
Uniformity.

And, first, negatively: The church cannot unify herself by decreeing uniformity of outward organization. For recall our definition of unity. Allow me to re-emphasize this point. For while the longing of many of God's chosen spirits for the unification of Christendom is one of the blessed signs of our times, I fear that this longing is in many instances as vague as it is intense. Accordingly, one of my principal objects to-night is to clear away so far as possible the mists which envelop this great problem; and this by showing wherein church unity really

consists—what it does not mean as well as what it does mean. For when the mists lift, Jehovah's watchmen will see eye to eye.

Recall, then, I say, what church unity means. It does not mean outward uniformity of creed and polity, not even an organized union of churches and sects; that is an artificial combination, or mechanical union, which can be ordered, and, therefore, also revoked by decrees of councils and by votes of assemblies. On the other hand, church unity does mean an inward, organic—so to speak—divinely physiological life, wherein all varieties of organs and functions are vitally convergent to one divine end. You can organize an external organization—that is man's work. You cannot organize an internal organism—that is God's work. All attempts, therefore, to ordain ecclesiastical unity, either by decrees of hierarchical conclaves or by votes of congregational assemblies, are attempts at human manufacture rather than recognition of divine offspring; and, therefore, sooner or later issue in moral failures. Here is the secret of the inevitable failure of all ecclesiastical irenicons, whether the Pope's recent Encyclical, or the Episcopate's brilliant overture, or the Disciples' generous propositions, or your humble speaker's proposal before the conference of the Evangelical Alliance at Florence, Italy, April 10, 1891.*

*For the sake of historic curiosity, I subjoin the irenicon I ventured to offer Christendom on that occasion:

"This coming ideal Church must have, of course, a common supreme standard of authority. Can there be, at least for us Protestants, any common supreme authority but the Bible itself? In agreeing to this, no intelligent Christian makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some kind of a creed—a creed that shall be at once simple, profound, comprehensive. Can there be any creed simpler,

Picture
of the Coming
Ideal Church.

The truth is, all attempts at singleness or uniformity of outward formal organization are against all analogies of organic living nature. Take the plant-world; what varieties of figures and functions from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springs up by the wall! Take the animal-world; what varieties of structure from protozoan to Homo! Take the man-world; what varieties of races, statures, sexes, faculties, temperaments, customs! Take the church-world; what varieties of creeds, politics, gifts, missions, graces! To undertake to decree that

more profound, more comprehensive than that which our Master himself has given when he repeatedly laid down as his test of discipleship: 'If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me?' In agreeing to this simple, profound, comprehensive creed, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some kind of organization. Can there be any better organization than a flexible one, adjusting itself to passing environments, here in Italy, there in America, now in this nineteenth century, hereafter in the twenty-ninth? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some prescribed mode of admission. Can there be any better mode of admission than the rite of baptism—a rite which, as ripest scholars in all communions admit, originally meant immersion? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some form of government. Can there be any better form of government than the Presbyterian—a form which is natural to all executive bodies? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some kind of headship; for all living things tend to some kind of presidency or coördinating centre. Can there be any form of headship more historic or decorous than the Episcopal? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some method of working—a method which shall be at once systematic, co-operative, effective. Can there be any method of working more systematic, co-operative or effective than the Methodist discipline? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some kind of liturgy; for worship instinctively seeks to express itself in forms that are at once stately and apposite. Can there be any better liturgy than a flexible one, judiciously blending the staidness of ancient prescribed forms and the appositeness of modern free adjustments? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Again, this coming Church must have some term of communion—a term that shall be common to all Christ's people. Can there be any better term of communion than communion with our Lord Jesus Christ as being the head of his Church or body, and therefore inter-communion with all Christians as being the members of his body? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.' Once more, this coming Church must have some kind of financial support. Can there be any better way of supporting the Church than by the voluntary system? In agreeing to this, no one makes any 'compromise.'

Such was my dream three years ago. I have grown wiser since.

there shall be but one kind of church organization is as unnatural and futile as to undertake to decree that there shall be but one kind of plant or one kind of animal or one kind of man. Many different members; but one common body. True, an unvarying uniformity of creed and polity and ritual in all lands and through all times, such as the Church of Rome so signally illustrates, is in a certain way very impressive. But there is peril in this very uniformity; and the exacter the uniformity, the more perilous. For Decrees of Concordance or "Acts of Uniformity" imply an autocracy which is more than apt to become despotic. See how, in the case of Rome, ecclesiasticism has tended to supplant character; the Church, the Bible; the Pope, our Lord. Thus the very uniformity of Romanism (and there is no more splendid example of homogeneousness) is morally perilous, tending to extinguish individualism and to deify churchism, and so annihilating the very idea of unity. No, church-unity cannot be secured by decreeing uniformity of organization.

Nor, again, can the church unify herself, at least in this age, by abolishing sects. In fact, I believe that each Christian sect, in so far as it really has Christ's own spirit, has a divine mission of its own. Who would wish to erase from the history of Christendom the story of the Waldenses, the Lutherans, the Puritans, the Moravians, the Jansenists, the Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Quakers, the Baptists? Of course, I cannot go into a detailed statement of the mission of each one of the sects; let me only attempt a swift characterization in roughest outline of the more salient features of the more prominent denominations.

Unity Cannot
be Secured
by Abolishing
Sects.

A Character-
ization of some
of the Sects.

A chief distinctive mission of the Roman Catholic branch of Christ's one Church (I mention it first only because it has by far the largest number of members) is, as it seems to me, to give play to the body-side of our nature; and this it does by its appeal to our senses in way of architecture, statuary, painting, music, colors, forms; and nobly is it fulfilling its sensitive vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Lutheran branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the reformatory side of our nature; and this it does by protesting against ecclesiastical and theological perversions, and insisting on a return to the apostolic evangel; and nobly is it fulfilling its conservative vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Presbyterian branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the theological side of our nature; and this it does by the prominence it assigns to creed and catechetical instruction; and nobly is it fulfilling its sturdy vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Episcopal branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the worshipful side of our nature; and this it does by the prominence it assigns to liturgy and æsthetics; and nobly is it fulfilling its devotional vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Methodist branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the active side of our nature; and this it does by the vigor of its ecclesiastical system and its recognition of the lay-element in its class meetings; and nobly is it fulfilling its robust vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Quaker branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the passive side of our nature; and this it does by its doctrine of the inner light, and by its disuse of forms; and nobly is it fulfilling its placid vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Congregational branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the

personal side of our nature; and this it does by its insistence on the right of each congregation to ecclesiastical independence; and nobly is it fulfilling its manly vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Baptist branch of Christ's one Church is to give play to the exacter side of our nature; and this it does by its demanding literal obedience to the New Testament ordinance of baptism; and nobly is it fulfilling its stalwart vocation. Thus each of the sects has its own peculiar mission; and each, I doubt not, would be benefitted by some absorption of the peculiarities of the others. I am quite sure that we Baptists (and this without abating one jot or tittle of our distinctive mission) would not be harmed by a little infusion of the Presbyterian polity, the Episcopal æsthetics, the Methodist discipline, the Quaker simplicity. For all things are ours; whether Paul, I Cor. 3: 21, 22, the apostle of advance—or Cephas, the apostle of retreat—or Apollos, the apostle of culture; all are ours; and we are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Nor, once more and most decidedly, can the church unify herself by compromise. This is the mistake of those unfortunates who are afflicted with cardiac hypertrophe, or diseased enlargement of heart. Compromise is often right in matters of policy or method. Compromise is always wrong in matters of principle or duty. Truth abhors compromise, as light abhors darkness. Truth advances her kingdom by affirmation, not by evasion; by victory, not by surrender. If there is in all this world a sacred right, it is the right of every human being to have his own personal moral convictions. If there is in all this world a sacred responsibility, it is the responsibility which every human being has before his God and before his fellows for

Unity Cannot
be Secured by
Compromise.

those convictions. If there is in all this world a sacred obligation, it is the obligation which rests on every human being to be true, at whatever cost, to those convictions. For the man who is willing to surrender his own convictions for the sake of "unity," is a man whose convictions for the sake of unity or of anything else are to be distrusted. For he who begins with being false to himself will end with being false to everybody else. Moreover, the unity which is brought about by compromise is not unity at all; it is only a weak, sentimental, flabby uniformity. The boneless, pulpy compromiser, like a composite photograph in which every sign of individuality is merged, looks remarkably kind and also remarkably weak. No; unity cannot be secured by compromise.

Unity Can be
Secured only
by Compre-
hension.

How then shall the church unify herself? And so, affirmatively: The church must unify herself by comprehension. Here was the grievous mistake of the beloved disciple when he said to his Divine Teacher:

"Master, we saw one casting out demons in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us."—*Luke 9: 49.*

It was the outburst of an intense sectarianism. It mattered not to John that this stranger was really doing a blessed service in Christ's name; the trouble was that he did not belong to St. John's little coterie; he was marching under a sort of independent flag. That was enough to condemn him; the Master had no use for irregular outsiders.

"But Jesus said, Forbid him not; for there is no man who shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able to quickly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because ye are Christ's, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. And whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it were better for him if a great

millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”—*Mark 9: 39-42.*

It is as though our Master had said: “No one who is really doing good in my name—in the sphere of my character and work—can be false to me. I even declare that he who does not array himself against me is really on my side; whoever does any service, however slight, shall have a heavenly reward; but whoever, by harsh treatment, causes one of these little ones or outsiders who love, however obscure, to fall into sin, it were better for him that he had suffered a felon’s death; instead then of repelling this stranger, you ought to have bidden him God-speed!” You see then our Master’s attitude in this matter of comprehension. The coming unity of his Church is to be secured, not by exclusion, but by inclusion.

“But to what extent would you include?” I hear you asking. To the extent of Christianity’s horizon, I reply; including anybody and everybody, of whatever sect or of no sect at all, who can be described by that august word—“Christian;” or, as the Apostle Paul expresses it, “All that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours.” I Cor. 1: 2.

“I will not ask my neighbor of his creed;
Nor what he deems of doctrine old or new;
Nor what rites his honest soul may need
To worship God—the only wise and true;
Nor what he thinks of the anointed Christ;
Nor with what baptism he has been baptized.

“I ask not what temptations have beset
His human heart, now self-abased and sore;
Nor by what wayside well the Lord he met;
Nor where was uttered, ‘Go and sin no more.’
Between his soul and God that business lies;
Not mine to cavil, question, or despise.

"I ask not by which name, among the rest
 That Christians go by, he is named or known;
 Whether his faith has ever been 'professed,'
 Or proven by his deeds alone.
 So there be Christhood in him, all is well;
 He is my brother, and in peace we dwell.

"If grace and patience in his actions speak,
 Or fall in words of kindness from his tongue,
 Which raise the fallen, fortify the weak,
 And heal the heart by sorrow rent and wrung;
 If he give good for ill, and love for hate—
 Friend of the friendless, poor and desolate—

"I find in him discipleship so true,
 So full, that nothing further I demand.
 He may be bondman, freedman, Gentile, Jew,
 But we are brothers—walk we hand in hand.
 In his white life let me the Christhood see;
 It is enough for him, enough for me."

Now this idea of comprehension is the modern contribution to Ecclesiology or the doctrine of the Church. The old method was to search for similarities; the new method is to recognize diversities. The Church's true policy here is not rejection, but adjustment; not insistence, but assistance; not as Paul and Barnabas angrily parted at Antioch, but as Abraham and Lot peaceably parted at Bethel; not as John, who cried "Forbid!" but as Jesus, who replied "Welcome!" not as cave dwellers moping in solitude, but as cosmopolitans living in God's open air. O, ye Christian sectarians—ye who are dwelling in dark glens of denominationalism; ye who, like Elijah in his cave, imagine that you alone are Jehovah's true prophets; ye who live in the hamlet of your sect, and

"Think the rustic cackle of your bourg
 The murmur of the world;"

come out from your dark little glen into the sunlight of God's open country, and see how vast is the dome of his sky!

But how shall this unity by comprehension be effected? Catholicity
the Ideal
Church Form.
And so I pass to present for a moment catholicity as the ideal church form. For each Christian sect, in so far as it has Christ's own spirit, does have, as we have seen, its own divine mission. Each sect is a facet in God's great diamond of truth, flashing prismatic hues, the union of which makes the white light. For it is not given to any one man, or to any one set of men, however great, to comprehend all truth; for, if it were, men themselves would become infinite. Accordingly, while sectarianism is born of sin, and is devilish, sect is born of finiteness, and may be even angelic. Do not try, then, to secure unity by hammering diversities into monotonous flatness. But try to secure unity by soaring high enough to comprehend diversities; even as God's own sky comprehends ocean and forest, valley and mountain, man and flower.

As a matter of fact, each denomination, in rearing its own ecclesiastical structure, does work selectively. That is to say, each sect, in building its own creed or polity, builds on the remembrance of certain scriptures which it regards as favorable, and on the oblivion of certain other scriptures which it regards as unfavorable; equally skilled in the art of remembering and in the art of forgetting; dexterously adjusting its powers of memory and its powers of oblivion to the supposed necessities of each case. In other words, each sect errs, not so much in what it believes as in what it fails to believe. The coming ideal Church will be built not on a selection of script-

ures, but on the Bible in its wholeness. Can there be any better way of bringing about the unification of Christendom than by the occasional and considerate interchange of Christian views in quiet and informal conferences of representative thinkers of all communions? If the Church is ever to be perfected into one, that perfection will be effected, not by resolutions of conventions or decrees of councils, but by the gradual and silent permeation of Christian sentiments throughout Christendom.

The Coming
Ideal Church.

One thing is certain: The coming ideal Church will be neither wholly Baptist, nor Episcopal, nor Methodist, nor Presbyterian, nor Roman, nor Quaker; but it will be Catholic with "Roman" left out. For Christianity, or the Kingdom of God, is larger than any denominational province in it; even as the United States is larger than the State of Pennsylvania. Christ's body is larger than any one member of it. Our Lord Jesus has but one body—he is not a monster. Denominationalism still has its place in the economy of Christendom; but that place is no longer in the foreground; that place is to be henceforth in the background. We are still to work along denominational lines; but we are to work along denominational lines only with a view to the Church as a one Whole. Christians are not *dissecta membra*; they are members one of another, and there is but one divine body. Is Christ divided? Can Satan dismember that blessed body, and toss one limb into the camp of the Baptists, a second limb into the camp of the Methodists, a third limb into the camp of the Presbyterians? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Peter, or Luther, or Calvin, or Wesley, or Fox, or Bunyan?

I Cor. 1: 13.

No; One is your Master, and all ye are brothers; fellow-members of that one body of which Christ is the one Head. And fellow-members are co-ordinate. The eye is a member of the body, and a very important member; but was the eye created to gaze only in a mirror and see nothing but the image of itself? The ear is another very important member of the organism; but what becomes of its importance if it is separated from the body? All the worth it has lies in the fact that it is a part of the body and ministers to it. If the whole Church were only one gigantic Congregational eye, or one colossal Methodist ear, or one stupendous Episcopal hand, or one enormous Presbyterian thumb, or one measureless Baptist foot—where were Christ's one, yet many-membered body? But now they are many members, yet but one body. Accordingly, the Episcopal eye cannot say to the Baptist hand, I have no need of thee; or again, the Pontifical head to the Lutheran feet, I have no need of you. For all Christians form the one body of Christ, and each Christian is a functional member thereof; and the one body of Christ is healthy and effective in proportion as each Christian faithfully discharges his own organic functions; all the members, whether eye or hand, ear or foot, sinew or nerve, bone or cell, working together in reciprocal co-operation.

Our topic is indeed momentous. I am quite aware that this struggling after Christian unity is often sneered at as a girlish sentimentalism, unworthy the sturdy muscle of denominational champions, contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. But does it never occur to these redoubtable knights of the faith, once for all

Our Topic
Momentous.

Jude 3.

delivered unto the saints, that this ancient faith meant and still means chiefly this—

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; there being no other commandment greater than these, since on these two commandments hangs the whole law and the prophets?—*Matthew 22: 37-40.*

Do these doughty warriors of the primitive orthodoxy never catch a glimpse of the majestic truth that the whole law is summed up in this royal word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; this love being itself the very bond of perfectness? Aye,

“I’m apt to think the man
That could surround the sum of things, and spy
The heart of God and secrets of his empire,
Would speak but love. With him the bright result
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,
And make one thing of all theology.”

This matter then of the unification of Christendom is more than a mere sentiment or sweet privilege; like humility or prayer or faith, it is not even a matter of option; it is the most imperial of all the commandments; it is the Ordinance of the ordinances. Now abideth faith, hope, love—these three; and the greatest of these is love. And no wonder; for God himself is love; so that he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. In brief, love is the characterizing mark of the Christian religion; separating it discretively from all other religions, and by that fact proving it to be divine—

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”—*John 13: 35.*

Auspicious
Auguries;

Thank God, we are living under happy auguries. The growing catholicity of our times, as indicated by such expressions

as these:—International law; international arbitration; international congresses for securing a common standard of time, of distance, of weight, of money, of signals; international Sunday School lessons; a universal alphabet; the world's fairs; the world's week of prayer; the numerous union societies throughout Christendom; the Evangelical Alliance; Young Men's Christian Associations; Christian Endeavor Societies; King's Sons; King's Daughters; the McAll Mission; the overtures of a liturgical church, and the responses of at least some non-liturgical churches; the inter-denominational salutations and reciprocities; the growing observance of ecclesiastical comity in mission stations; the letters of commendation and transfer from one denomination to another; the growing care for the poor and feeble and "uncomely parts;" the marked tendency toward co-operation in Christian reforms and charities throughout the world; the recent recognition of the Sunday before Christmas as the universal Peace Sunday; the already wellnigh observance of Sunday itself as the world's common Sabbath; the Parliament of Religions; the growing disposition to maximize the points wherein the sects agree and to minimize the points wherein the sects differ; in brief, the growing desire to follow after things which make for peace, and things by which we may upbuild one another—all this and such as this is auspicious of the happy day when Ephraim shall no longer envy Judah, and Judah shall no longer vex Ephraim. And in that coming day of everlasting amity, all Christians, of whatever sect, will be "low churchmen," because true to man; all will be "high churchmen," because true to God; all will be "broad churchmen," because true to God and to man. Or, to borrow phrases from

Rom. 14: 19.

Isaiah 11: 13.

U O P N

Continental parliaments, all Christians will belong to the "Right," and all will belong to the "Left," and all will belong to the "Centre;" because Jesus Christ—himself the Master of Assemblies—is alike centre, radius, circumference. Then shall all earth become one Jerusalem, and all days one perpetual Pentecost, wherein the unity of mankind, lost at Babel, shall be restored in Christ, and all men shall again be of one speech.

Heaven grant us the blessedness of seeing with our own eyes what many prophets and righteous men have from the beginning desired to see, namely, One Christian Church, even—

THE ONE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE SON OF GOD.

Collect for
All Saints' Day

O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; grant us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[THE END.]



W. H. U.

